

Charles Theodore Parkes / [A. Ochsner].

Contributors

Ochsner, Alton, 1896-1981.

Publication/Creation

[Place of publication not identified] : [publisher not identified], [1923]

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Reprint from
SURGERY, GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS
April, 1923, pages 578-581

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CHARLES THEODORE PARKES

By A. J. OCHSNER, M.D., F.A.C.S., CHICAGO

DURING the years immediately following the beginning of antiseptic surgery, a group of young surgeons appeared in America with quite unusual qualifications—men with boundless energy, unflinching perseverance, absolute honesty of purpose, clearness of judgment, exalted enthusiasm, and an intense desire to advance to the highest surgical excellence.

Many of these surgeons were splendid anatomists and excellent practitioners of general medicine, but had not enjoyed the benefits of a university education. In many cases, however, the student had engaged in teaching public school, or had broadened his mind by contact with men of ability during service in the army in our Civil War.

These men were hardy and clear-headed, unafraid of hardships or hard work. What they lacked in scientific training they made up in character and personality, and in those individual characteristics which enable men to accomplish unusual ends, and to leave a lasting impression upon their fellow workers and upon their community.

The most brilliant and withal the most lovable and attractive, and in his personality the most distinguished of all the surgeons of this group, was Dr. Charles T. Parkes of Chicago. Physically large and powerful, he was able to perform an unbelievable amount of work. Mentally a giant, he was able to grasp the surgical problems of his day with a clearness and precision which have rarely been equalled among the many great surgeons whose work I have been privileged to observe. His success depended primarily upon natural ability, personality, industry, and perseverance, but his environment and education aided greatly in bringing about such unusual results.

For generations his father's people were iron-workers in Stratfordshire, England. His mother's family had migrated to England from Brittany. His parents came to America in the late twenties of the past century. His father engaged in the production of iron, becoming half owner of one of the largest iron works in the west, located at St. Louis, Missouri.

During these years young Parkes enjoyed educational advantages in private and public schools, interrupted attendance at high school and 2 years at Ann Arbor University. The panic in the late fifties swept away his father's fortune,

and this and the beginning of the Civil War interrupted his education. He taught school before joining the Union army at the age of twenty. He entered service as an enlisted man, and during his 3 years' service he became the most skillful drillmaster in the 117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. While holding a captain's commission, he was given an independent command at Island No. 10 in the Mississippi River. He received mention in the War Department Records for an act of heroism.

Immediately following his discharge from the army, he entered Rush Medical College becoming the special student of the professor of anatomy. No doubt his army experience gave Parkes a willingness and an ability to do the enormous amount of work involved in carrying his studies, while doing the work of assistant to the chair of anatomy and acting as prosector.

Shortly after his graduation in 1868, he was made demonstrator of anatomy, which position he held until 1875, when he was elected to the chair of anatomy in Rush Medical College. This position he filled with distinction until the year 1887, when upon the death of Professor Moses Gunn, he was elected to occupy the chair of principles and practice of surgery and clinical surgery in his Alma Mater.

Shortly after his graduation, he received the appointment of surgeon to the North Chicago Rolling Mills, attending surgeon to Cook County Hospital, attending surgeon and later surgeon-in-chief of St. Joseph's and Augustana Hospitals, and attending surgeon to the Presbyterian Hospital. Dr. Parkes studied in London, Edinburgh, and Paris during the year 1878, and visited the surgical clinics of Germany during the summer of 1888 and 1890.

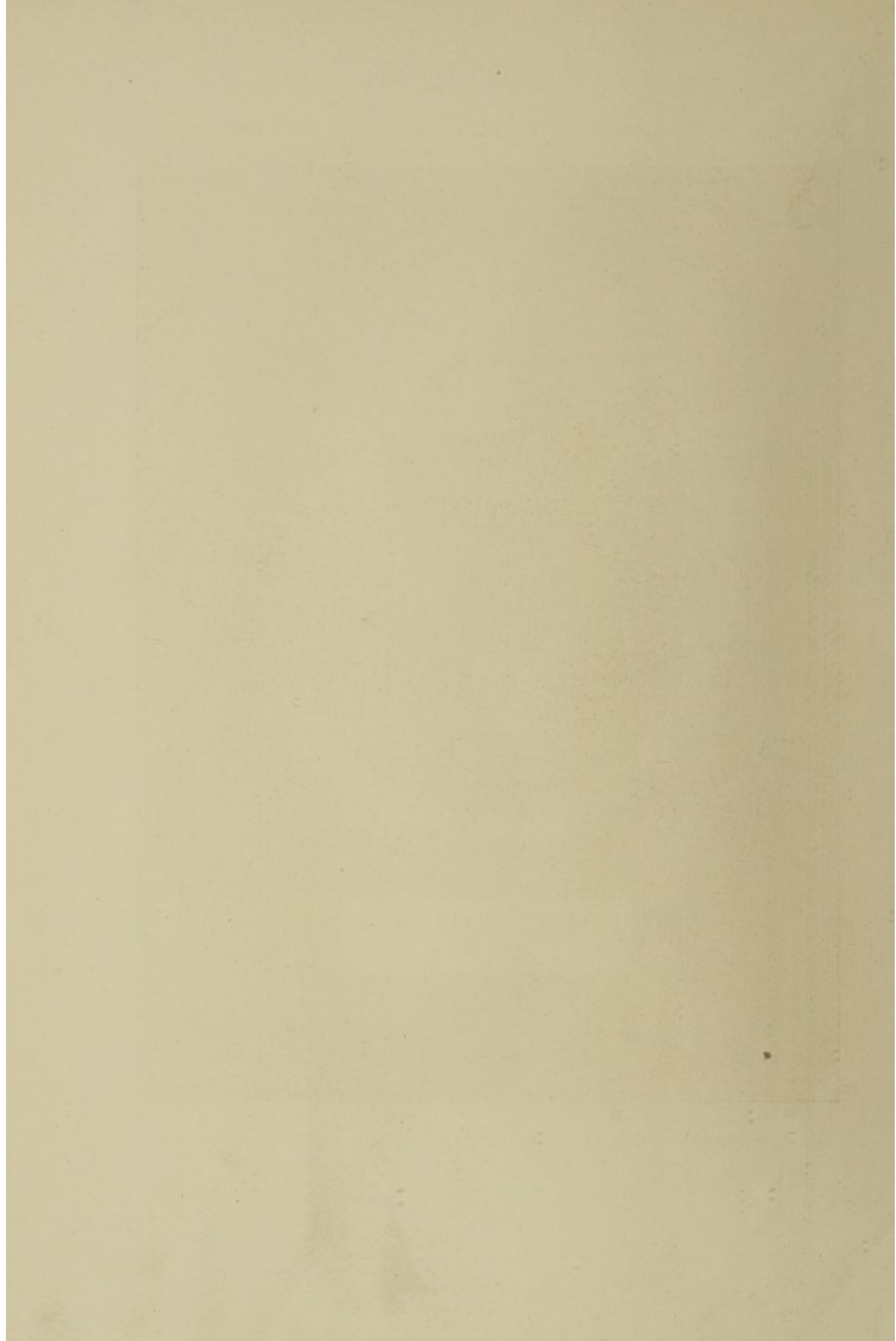
Dr. Parkes possessed great physical and moral courage. A story of his army life shows this side of his character. During an engagement, while within easy range of the enemy, it became necessary to signal to a re-enforcing division. In order to be seen, he mounted a fence in view of the enemy and gave his signal with a flag. Immediately a volley aimed by the enemy shattered the fence, fortunately leaving him unharmed on the ground. The flag, with its shattered staff, is in the State Museum at Springfield.

The following story is told to illustrate his enormous physical strength. In demonstrating anatomy, he was constantly annoyed by a large fellow, who persisted in crowding in ahead of the other students. When the patience of Dr. Parkes was exhausted, he picked the man up bodily, passed him over his head, and dropped him down behind him, to the great pleasure of the class.

Parkes received much inspiration from the remarkable men who composed the faculty of Rush Medical College from 1865 to 1890. Every man was a leader of men. They may not have ranked so high, in a cultural sense, as some professors in eastern medical schools, but they were enthusiastic teachers, who made teaching their first responsibility. Among these men were Moses Gunn,



CHARLES THEODORE PARKES
1842-1891



J. Adams Allen, William Byford, Robert L. Rae, Henry Lyman, Edward Holmes, Delaskie Miller, Joseph Ross, J. W. Freer, and later Norman Bridge, James Nevius Hyde, and the best teacher and most charming gentleman of all, Walter Haines.

With these remarkable men he worked with wonderful enthusiasm, first as student and assistant, and later as the most distinguished colleague. His lectures and clinics were perfectly prepared, without regard to what it cost in fatigue or sacrifice, in consultation or practice. His college work was always his first responsibility. It was this which cost him his life. He was taken with influenza, but would not remain at home on his clinic day, although he was strongly urged to do this. During this clinic he had his fatal chill.

Parkes was one of the first surgeons west of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, who performed many abdominal operations during the years 1880 to 1890. His diagnostic ability was so great that he acquired a national reputation which brought difficult cases to his clinic from many states. His absolute mastery of anatomy, with his years of practice in the dissecting room, gave him a command of surgical technique which I have rarely seen equalled and never excelled. His familiarity with every tissue enabled him to complete an extensive operation in an incredibly short time with an amount of traumatism so slight, when compared with that produced by other surgeons, that his patients came out of the anæsthetic with enormously less shock than similar patients operated on by other surgeons. They consumed much less ether, were exposed a shorter time to the possibility of infection, and their wounds were in a much better condition for primary union because the tissues had not been unduly traumatized. He emphasized the importance of tying sutures so as to secure exact co-aptation, but never strangulation of tissues. His wounds healed regularly by primary union quite to the extent that such results are obtained in the very best clinics today.

With the exception of operations upon the eye, nose, and throat, he covered the entire field of surgery, excelling in general, abdominal, and gynecological surgery. His operations on bones and joints, and those for club feet, wry neck, cleft palate, hare-lip, and other deformities were quite remarkable and original. Here again his complete anatomical knowledge gave him an unusual advantage. He was, I believe, the first surgeon in this country to remove a stone from the pelvis of a kidney, and from the common bile duct, and one of the first to perform many gall-stone operations.

Parkes was one of the first surgeons in this country engaged in extensive original research and animal experimentation. His address "The Treatment of Gunshot Wounds of the Small Intestine as a Result of a Series of Experiments on Forty Dogs" presented before the American Medical Association in 1884, is a splendid piece of work, and his conclusions are still surgically correct. This was the most notable one of his many excellent papers. Of these, one on chole-

cystostomy, and one on choledochotomy, which operations he performed in 1885, amputation of arm, together with clavicle and scapula for sarcoma in 1889 with report of two cases, fifty successive cases of ovariectomy for removal of tumors, 1888, received international attention.

Parkes entered the field of surgery before Billroth, Volkmann, and Fenger had introduced pathological training in the field of preparation for entrance into surgical practice; in fact before American medical colleges were equipped with pathological laboratories, but his surgical judgment was so excellent and his observations so acute and so extensive that this lack of training in a subject, upon which we now lay so much stress, did not seriously impair his surgical efficiency.

As a teacher, Parkes was the ideal of the medical student and the practitioner alike, because he gave them in a clear, concise way, exactly what they needed in their practice, not loaded down with a lot of irrelevant material. This is shown with great clearness in his clinical lectures which were taken down stenographically during the last year of his life, and published after his death. I have recently read these lectures again, and was amazed to see how much of the best of our present surgical practice they contained. Practically all of the younger surgeons of the middle and western states attended his enormous clinics at Rush Medical College, and followed his teaching in their practice. Thus he became the teacher of hundreds of progressive young surgeons.

Parkes died March 28, 1891, at the age of forty-eight, at the height of his success. He kept thoroughly abreast with all advancement in surgery of his day, and received recognition from all sides. Few men have had the personality, the industry, and the ability to accomplish so much as did Dr. Parkes in the few years of his too short life.